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THE
REFORMED
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YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE.

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IS CAPABLE OF COMPREHENDING IT.

To the man of eager desire for knowledge, whose mind is as fair and truthful as external Nature ; in a word whose intellect has been so purged from prejudice and error that it has become a constituent part of that subject which he is investigating, there is room for unending progress, with assurance that he is standing on unshaken basis. To him all nature in every part of her kingdom, whether material or spiritual, past, present or to come, all alike seems to be a part of an organized system ; and therefore as he is himself a part thereof he possesses an intellect fitted for its comprehension.

II.

ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE DIES IRÆ.

BY THOS. C. PORTER, D.D., LL.D.

Amongst the famous hymns that have come down to us from the Middle Ages the highest place has been awarded to the "Dies iræ" of Thomas de Celano, a Franciscan monk of Italy, who died about the year 1255. A host of eminent divines and laymen in Germany, England and America, Protestants as well as Roman Catholics, have with one accord chanted its praises during the last half century, and the interest awakened has given rise to a multitude of versions in these countries. Their number in the German language is said to be at least 100, and in the English, over 235. Of the latter, Dr. Schaff, in his "Literature and Poetry," names 150, and indicates, by asterisks prefixed, 12 of them, which he considers the best. To the list he adds the following critical estimate: "One good translation is worth a hundred poor ones and will outlive them. Many were still-born or not born at all. But the ever-increasing number is a proof of the popularity and untranslatableness of the 'Dies iræ,' the greatest religious lyric of all ages."

The bringing over of a lyrical poem of the first rank into another language is indeed a difficult task, if the aim be, as it should, not a translation or a paraphrase merely, but a reproduction, that shall bear as strong a likeness to the original as possible. For the attainment of such a result the metrical form must be preserved. It is an essential element and cannot be abandoned without loss. Dr. Neale, who followed this rule in his other hymns from the Latin, when he took up the "De Contemptu Mundi" of Bernard of Cluni, found in its peculiar meter an insuperable barrier and therefore wisely created from its substance his "Celestial Country," which is in fact a new poem, equal,

and perhaps superior, to the old. Examples of this kind are, however, extremely rare.

And now the question arises in regard to the "*Dies iræ*." Has its meter as used in our English versions been successful, or is it defective? In order to test the matter, let any one compare with its first line, *Dies iræ, dies illa*, these translations of it: *Day of wrath! O day of mourning!* (Dr. Irons), *Day of vengeance, without morrow* (Gen. Dix), *Day of wrath, that day of burning* (Dr. Coles), and it will be felt at once that they are less compact, and hence weaker, because they contain more letters, for the pronunciation of which a longer time is required. Counting the letters in all their stanzas, the average proportion to those of the original is as 13.7 to 10, the wonderful compactness of the Latin being largely due to its lack of articles and its fewer prepositions.

A further impediment to complete success lies in the triple, double-rhymed trochaic endings of the stanzas. Unlike the German, our language is too poor to furnish enough of the best kind, and the critical ear is wounded by the terminal *ings* of too many present participles, as well as by the endings, *ission, ution* and *ation*, which in Shakespeare's day were trisyllabic.

Fortunately both these obstacles disappear, if the original metre, trochaic tetrameter, be slightly modified, made catalectic by dropping the final syllables. That has been done in the versions of Archbishop Trench, Dean Alford and Dr. Schaff. The lines are rendered thereby more compact, for the letters in all the stanzas of the three versions named bear the average proportion of but 11.6 to 10 in the Latin. Moreover, enough perfect single rhymes are attainable.

The meter thus modified is, perhaps, as near to that of the original as the genius of the English language will permit. And yet, it is not altogether exotic. It plays its part in one of our grandest and most popular hymns, the *Rock of Ages*, with the only difference that its rhymes, are triple, a feature not at all detrimental to the peculiar dignity of the poem, if the third line be read at a lower pitch of the voice.

Defective rhyme does indeed more or less injure the standing and the value of a lyric poem. Sidney Lanier, himself a master of verse, has written: "If the rhyme is not perfect, if it demands any, even the least, allowance, it is not tolerable. No rhyme but a perfect rhyme is worth a poet's while." Dr. Stryker, in his little book on the "Dies iræ," approves of this severe judgment, and says of Dean Alford's version: "It is terse, clear and of great dignity: but not without the false junction of 'penned' with 'contained'—a slip of the graving tool which mars all the cameo." And yet, by a strange oversight, in his own three versions "afford" is expected to chime with "Lord," "creature" with "nature" and "peace" with "these." That false rhymes are far too common in the poems of almost all of our English bards cannot be denied, but there is a wide difference in their character. Some leave no really bad impression and may receive toleration, whilst others are very offensive to a pure taste and act like "the dead flies in the ointment of the apothecary," or Horace's "poppy in Sardinian honey," or the opera singer's blundering note or mispronunciation before an Italian audience. But the worst examples of the sort abound in our hymn-books, in lyrics prepared for the service of the sanctuary and sung every Sunday by thousands and thousands of worshippers. The ancient Hebrew was not allowed to place a defective victim on the altar of the Lord. His lamb or goat had to be "without blemish and without spot." If blind, or crippled, or lame, or diseased, it was rejected by the priest. And so it ought to be here and now. Good Dr. Watts, who wrote a few excellent hymns in faultless rhyme, nodded like Homer when he penned

"Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own his cause (cos),
Or blush to speak his name (nam)?"

a stanza hardly better than the well-known

"Here I raise my Ebenezer ;
Hither by thy help I've come,
And I hope by thy good pleasure (pleezer)
Safely to arrive at home (hum)."

Since no human work can be absolutely perfect, defective rhymes may be discovered in some of our finest hymns, but they are usually of a minor grade and so hidden or atoned for by superiority in other respects that they are unnoticed by the untrained ear, just as the spots of the sun, shining in his glory, are observed by no eye except that of the astronomer. In the Rock of Ages "flowed" is coupled with "blood" and "cure" with "power," and the "*Dies iræ*" itself is not immaculate. In its stanzas 2, 8 and 13, two of the double-rhymed endings are alike, and in stanzas 11 and 16, all three, yet this repetition does not seem to occasion the least jar. But in stanza 15, *præstra*, *questra* and *dextra* are not in full accord.

Some of the translators have adopted a measure in which the trochees are converted into iambs, with a manifest loss of power. This is evident from the fact that

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

would be greatly impaired if changed into

Thou Rock of Ages cleft for me,
Oh, let me hide myself in Thee!

But, important as the choice of the right meter is for the reproduction of the hymn, much more is needed. The circumstances connected with its birth demand careful consideration. Carried back, therefore, along a line of almost eight centuries, imagination brings us to a learned and devout monk seated alone in the secluded cell of his cloister. A friend and associate of St. Francis of Assisi, he lives in an age of extraordinary religious fervor. After long and profound meditation upon that most certain and tremendous event of the future, the drama of the last judgment unfolds itself before him step by step in solemn and distinct vision. The outside world has wholly vanished from his thoughts. His mind is centered on one thing only, and that is, "the wrath to come." In this exalted mood he is truly inspired, and writes without the least taint of an ambition for literary fame or the design even of preparing a hymn for the

service of the church. His voice is a genuine cry "out of the depths" and has all the realness, simplicity and intensity of the publican's prayer, of Peter's on the sea, or those of blind Bartimeus and the Philippian jailor. There is no attempt at grandiloquence. The language and the imagery are borrowed from the Holy Scriptures and no extravagant terms are employed in order to heighten the effect. And just for this reason it still deeply moves the hearts of men and will continue so to do until the arrival of the day of doom itself. It has been called a "dirge" and a "threnody," which it certainly is not, being a fervent prayer for the salvation of a single soul. Although used as a sequence in the burial service of the Roman Church, it contains no trace of lamentation over the dead. It is not at all elegiac.

The poet opens his hymn in the first stanza with the declaration that the whole world shall be reduced to ashes, and fixes his eye on its completed destruction. The agent that produced it is not the chief thing. The sight of these cold ashes is to him more terrible than the conflagration itself. Many of the translators think otherwise and introduce into their versions such words as "burning," "flames," "fiery," "lightnings," and the like, all of which are out of place and mar the beauty of the poem by diverting the mind of the reader from the main thought. One writer goes so far as to glory in the supposed discovery that the true meaning of the word *favilla* has been misapprehended, and accordingly, in his several versions, renders it by the phrases, "hot embers," "fiery dust" and "blazing dust." Going back to classic Latin we find that it denotes what is left of the body after Cremation, and Horace, in his ode to Septimius (Lib. 2 : 6), enjoins him to shed a tributary tear on the warm ashes (*favillam calentem*) of his poet friend, whilst conveying them from the pyre to the urn. But the church soon discouraged cremation. Earth-burial gradually supplanted it and hence the word *favilla* came, in the course of time, to signify the cold, earthy remains of a corpse, whether it had been consumed by fire or decomposed by the forces of nature. Such was its meaning in the thirteenth century, as is clear from its use in the eighteenth stanza of the

“*Dies iræ*,” where it must mean that and nothing else. Sir Walter Scott so interprets it in his line, “When man to judgment wakes from clay.” The idea of the dead rising out of “fiery dust” has no warrant in Scripture. The resurrection precedes the judgment; the conflagration succeeds it. Fire and flames do indeed occur in stanzas fourteen and sixteen, but they are those of Gehenna and not of a burning world. The author of the hymn seems to have been far less impressed by St. Peter’s graphic picture of “the elements melting with fervent heat” (2 Pet. 3 : 12) than by the words of St. Paul: “For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5 : 10, 11).

From the brief and simple reference to the completed outcome of the day of wrath in the first, the poet in his second stanza goes back to its beginning, to the coming of the Judge, and does not lose sight of Him for a moment through all the sixteen stanzas that follow. In the third he goes back still further and describes the resurrection of the dead, the assembling of the vast multitude around the throne and the unrolling of the written volumes in which the deeds, good and bad, of every individual man are minutely recorded. He names but one book (*Liber scriptus*), whereas two or more are spoken of in Daniel (7 : 18) and the Apocalypse (23 : 12). As the art of printing had not yet been invented, books to him were parchment scrolls, volumes in the original sense of the word. Then he sees the Judge ascend the throne with these records spread out before him, a judge, whose all searching glance not the least thing can escape. Overwhelmed by the vision, he trembles and exclaims: “What, poor soul, will become of thee? Where shall I find an advocate to plead thy cause?” And then, instead of turning to any patron-saint of the calendar, he makes a direct appeal to the Judge himself. The remainder of the poem, and the very heart of it, from stanza eight to seventeen inclusive, is a prayer, or rather a succession of prayers, for mercy. The concluding stanzas, eighteen and nine-

teen, were probably added from older sources by compilers of the missals.

There is one hymn, before alluded to, of purely English origin, which in other points, besides that of the meter, bears a strong resemblance to this prayer of the "Dies iræ," and, although not equal to it in grandeur and power, is yet a lyric gem of priceless value. Toplady, when he composed the "Rock of Ages," must have been acquainted with its mediæval prototype and derived inspiration from it, as may be inferred from the close of his last stanza. But, for all that, each is an independent creation. The authors look from different standpoints and represent different theologies, which, however, are complemental and not antagonistic. The Protestant divine makes his appeal to the Saviour on the cross and lays special stress on the present all-cleansing virtue of His atoning blood, whilst the pious monk directs his prayer to the same Saviour on the throne of judgment, risen, exalted, glorified, meting out their final doom to the righteous and to the wicked.

The quiet influence which, emanating from the "Dies iræ" has so deeply moved the minds and hearts of scholars and educated men in Great Britain and America, both in our age and those bygone, can never be fully estimated, but there is little risk in ascribing to it the magnificent sermon of Jeremy Taylor on the "Day of Judgment," a masterpiece in prose, well worthy of a place beside the great hymn itself.

Having now given free expression to my views in regard to the "Dies iræ" and its translation into English, I venture to add below the reprint of a version of it already published in the *Guardian* of October, 1882, and in Dr. Schaff's "Literature and Poetry," 1890, because new light, gained from further study, has rendered certain amendments and alterations desirable. Of course, no claim of superiority or equality to any hitherto produced is assumed on its behalf.

DIES IRÆ.

DAY OF WRATH.

I.

Dies iræ, dies illa,
Solvat sæclum in favillâ,
Teste David cum Sybillâ.

1.

Day of wrath ! That final day
Shall the world in ashes lay,
David and the Sybil say.

II.

Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando Judex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus !

2.

Oh, what tremor there will be,
When the Judge, mankind shall see
Come from strictest scrutiny !

III.

Tuba, mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum.

3.

Pealing far the trumpet's tone
Shall from graves of every zone,
Gather all before the throne.

IV.

Mors stupebit, et natura,
Cum resurget creatura,
Judicanti responsura.

4.

Death and Nature, in surprise,
Shall behold the creature rise,
Summoned to the grand assize.

V.

Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus judicetur.

5.

Then the books* shall be unrolled,
In whose volumes manifold
All the deeds of time are told.

VI.

Judex ergo cum sedebit
Quidquid latet apparebit,
Nil inultum remanebit.

6.

When his seat the Judge has ta'en,
Hidden things will hide in vain,
Naught shall unavenged remain.

VII.

Quid sum, miser, tunc dicturus,
Quem patronum rogaturus,
Cum vix justus sit securus?

7.

What, poor soul, wilt thou then say?
Who shall plead for thee that day,
When the righteous feel dismay?

VIII.

Rex tremendæ majestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis !

8.

King of dreadful majesty,
Whose salvation is so free,
Fount of Pity, save Thou me !

IX.

Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuæ viæ ;
Ne me perdas illâ die !

9.

Jesu, kind, remember I
Caused Thy coming down to die ;
Lest I perish, heed my cry !

* See Dan. 7 : 10 and Rev. 22 : 12.

DIES IRÆ.

X.

Quærens me, sedisti lassus,
Redemisti crucem passus :
Tantus labor non sit cassus.

XI.

Juste Judex ultionis,
Donum fac remissionis
Ante diem rationis !

XII.

Ingemisco tanquam reus,
Culpâ rubet vultus meus ;
Supplicanti parce, Deus !

XIII.

Qui Mariam absolvisti,
Et latronem exaudisti,
Mihi quoque spem dedisti.

XIV.

Preces meæ non sunt dignæ,
Sed Tu bonus fac benigne,
Ne perenni cremer igne.

XV.

Inter oves locum præsta,
Et ab hædis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra.

XVI.

Confutatis maledictis
Flammis acribus addictis,
Voca me cum benedictis !

XVII.

Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis :
Gere curam mei finis !

XVIII.

Lacrymosa dies illa,
Qua resurget ex favillâ,
Judicandus homo reus,
Huic ergo parce, Deus !

XIX.

Jesu pie, Domine,
Dona eis requie !
Amen.

DAY OF WRATH.

10.

By Thee weary I was sought,
By thy bitter passion bought ;
Can such labor go for naught ?

11.

Just Avenger, let me win
Full remission of my sin,
Ere the reckoning begin !

12.

Like a criminal I groan ;
Blushing, all my guilt I own :
Hear, O God, a suppliant's moan !

13.

Mary's pardon came from Thee
And the robber's on the tree,
Giving also hope for me.

14.

Tho my prayers no merit earn,
Let Thy favor on me turn,
Lest in quenchless fire I burn.

15.

From the goats my lot divide,
With the sheep a place provide
On Thy right hand, justified.

16.

As the curséd, clothed in shame,
Pass to fierce, tormenting flame,
With the blesséd call my name !

17.

Broken-hearted, low I bend ;
From the dust my prayer I send :
Let Thy mercy crown my end !

18.

When, on that most tearful day,
Man to judgment waked from clay
Quails at Thine uplifted rod,
Spare the sinner, gracious God !

19.

Jesu, Lord, their trials o'er,
Grant them rest forevermore !
Amen.

PROSPECTUS

— OF THE —

Reformed Church Review.


The REFORMED CHURCH REVIEW is the lineal successor of the REFORMED QUARTERLY REVIEW, as that was of the MERCERSBURG REVIEW. And, true to its antecedents, it will continue to be an organ for Christological, historical and positive theology, as this has come to be generally understood in the Reformed Church in the United States. Taking its position in the confessional system of the Heidelberg Catechism, it will endeavor to be true to the historical genius of the Reformed Church; but believing in the principle of historical development, it will not shut itself up to the horizon of any particular place or time in theology, but will have an open vision and a cordial welcome for all truth, new as well as old, from whatever quarter it may come.

The REVIEW will strive to be truly catholic and liberal in spirit. It proposes to serve the cause of pure truth and of pure religion. It will, therefore, not be bound by any party lines. But seeking to serve and promote the truth as it is in Christ, it will endeavor to keep itself free from all forms of theological bondage. Freedom of thought within the limits of Christian truth will ever be its watchword. Hence it retains the old motto, only in a more complete form: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

But while the REVIEW will serve chiefly as an organ for the advancement of theological learning, it will by no means exclude from its pages articles on other and more general subjects. It recognizes the truth that to Christianity, and, therefore, also to theology, nothing that is human is foreign. Natural science, philosophy, literature, ethics, sociology and kindred branches of knowledge, are at present engaging wide and earnest attention; and articles along these lines, written in the spirit of this REVIEW, are, accordingly, invited for its pages.

Finally, the REVIEW proposes to meet, as far as possible, the practical demands of the times. This is an eminently practical age. It has not much patience with mere speculation of any kind. What is wanted now is practical activity, applying the principles of Christianity to the daily affairs of life, and making the world better and happier. This tendency of the times the REVIEW believes not to be contrary to the mind of the Master; and it will, therefore, seek to furnish a due proportion of articles on practical subjects along the line of applied Christianity and Church work.

The REFORMED CHURCH REVIEW is edited by William Rupp, D.D., assisted by a corps of able writers. It is published quarterly, in the months of January, April, July and October of each year. Each number will contain an average of 144 pages.

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